

UDO4 Ups Ante for Future Exercises

Press Release

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The size, complexity, quality of decisions, and the ability to communicate effectively with the multiple agencies involved in "Unified Defense '04" have raised the bar for future U.S. Northern Command exercises, said officials at Peterson AFB.

"We've raised the ante. Expectations will be even higher for our next exercise," said Army Lt. Col. Tim Croft, a USNORTHCOM exercise planner.

The exercise, referred to as UDO4, was held Feb. 19–25. It involved more than 50 federal, state and local agencies in a series of simulated natural disasters and terrorist activities in Texas, Alaska, Colorado, Virginia and the National Capital Region.

UDO4 also included participants from North American Aerospace Defense Command, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, and the Joint Staff.

"An awful lot of learning occurred in this exercise," said Marine Corps Col. Gene Pino, USNORTHCOM director of training and exercise. He said this was the consensus among participants he talked to, including people at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and state and local agencies. And everyone had the same response to what they had learned: "we will make changes, and we will be better," said Pino.

Due to operational security, USNORTHCOM officials would not discuss any of the lessons learned.

"We don't want to address specific issues because that would mean providing too much information to terrorists," said Mike Perini, public affairs director for NORAD and USNORTHCOM. "We can say, however, that this was a very productive exercise and we appreciate all the participants," he said.

The goal of UDO4 was to test homeland security, homeland defense and the military's ability to deliver assistance to civil authorities during a presidential declared emergency or disaster.

"What we did in this exercise was provide the mechanisms that will further empower the nation to respond to a crisis in the homeland," said Pino. He said the exercise also allowed federal, state and local agencies to train in an environment "as close to reality



Coast Guard Maritime Safety and Security Team 91103, of San Pedro, Calif., conducts a vertical insertion from an Air Station Sitka Jayhawk helicopter onto the Petersburg-based Coast Guard cutter Anacapa in Juneau Harbor during Unified Defense 04 training.

Photo credit: Petty Officer Russ Tippetts, U.S. Coast Guard

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as possible? so everyone will know what to do ?if, God forbid, we have to respond to a real crisis.?

Was UDO4 a success? It was if success is not defined as ?being perfect or dazzling with no room for refinement,? said Pino. He said if success means being ?dedicated to fixing the seams and gaps, then training to improve,? the exercise was a success.

USNORTHCOM conducted UDO4 based on the Initial National Response Plan, its modifications and revisions. When approved, the final plan will replace the 1992 Federal Response Plan that outlines the federal government?s role in emergency and disaster situations.

DHS is responsible for the response plan, which covers requirements following a disaster or emergency, including saving lives, protecting property, meeting basic human needs, restoring the disaster area, and reducing vulnerability to future disasters.

Last year, USNORTHCOM held its first multi-level exercise, ?Determined Promise ?03,? in Nevada. That exercise focused primarily on a simulated biological terrorist attack. UDO4 focused on a terrorist nuclear attack in Texas. Other scenarios involved simulated hijackings of commercial airliners, a cyber-attack against Department of Defense computers, and attacks against maritime and port security assets in Alaska.

While exercise scenarios were simulated, response to each event was not, said Croft. He explained that participants not only accessed and analyzed each situation in real-time, they then had to base decisions on real-world availability of resources.

?Staff had to consider not just the active-duty resources, but also what was available from National Guard and Reserve units,? said Croft. He said decision-makers had to look at the bigger picture to deploy equipment and people to disaster and emergency sites as quickly as possible.

With hundreds of decisions being made by multiple agencies in numerous locations, communications proved to be a challenge during the exercise but one that USNORTHCOM was ready and able to meet, said Croft.

A month before the exercise, USNORTHCOM sent an operations, intelligence and information team to 20 different agencies that would participate in UDO4, including Canadian NORAD Region in Winnipeg, Canada; FEMA Region VI in Denton, Texas; Joint Task Force, Alaska; and the Terrorist Threat Integration

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Center in Washington, D.C.

Team chief Robert Seetin said they explained how USNORTHCOM communicates internally, how it could communicate with external agencies, and provided training on the systems and tools needed to be part of this communications network.

Not only did the communication systems improve the information cross-flow, it also allowed exercise participants to obtain immediate and detailed information about each simulated event and then verify information from a variety of sources, said Dave Harless, a watch officer with the information synchronization group (ISG) at USNORTHCOM.

The ISG synchronized exercise information and intelligence efforts for the command and monitored the communications process to ensure participants did not become so focused on their specific mission that they failed to pass along vital information.

USNORTHCOM will conduct its next major exercise in August. "Determined Promise '04" will include participants from Virginia and California, said Pino.